

Gulfcoast South AHEC's
3rd Annual Community Health Worker Conference

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Stress Management

What is **STRESS**?

Nervousness tension, pressure, strain, irritability, tension, constant worry, anxiety

The role of Community Health Workers (CHWs) can be very stressful! You are probably handling family and job responsibilities, demands of church and other community duties as well as your role as a CHW. Consequently, the ability to manage stress is absolutely critical to the success of your role as a CHW.

Our fast-paced society often causes people to push their minds and bodies to the limit, often at the expense of physical and mental well-being. According to the Mind/Body Medical Institute at Harvard University, between 60 and 90 percent of all medical office visits in the United States are for stress related disorders.

Relaxation techniques are helpful tools for coping with stress and promoting long-term health by slowing down the body and quieting the mind. How do relaxation techniques work? When we become stressed, our bodies engage in something called the "fight or flight response." The fight or flight response refers to changes that occur in the body when it prepares to either fight or run. These changes include increased heart rate, blood pressure, and rate of breathing, and a 300 to 400 percent increase in the amount of blood being pumped to the muscles. Over time, these reactions raise cholesterol levels, disturb intestinal activities, and depress the immune system. In general, they leave us feeling "stressed out."

Myths About Stress and Time Management

- ❖ Myth #1: All stress is bad. No, there's good and bad stress. Good stress is excitement, thrills, etc. The goal is to recognize personal signs of bad stress and deal with them.
- ❖ Myth #2: Planning my time just takes more time. Actually, research shows the opposite.
- ❖ Myth #3: I get more done in more time when I wisely use caffeine, sugar, alcohol or nicotine. Wrong! Research shows that the body always has to "come down" and when it does, you can't always be very effective then after the boost.

- ❖ Myth #4: A time management problem means that there's not enough time to get done what needs to get done. No, a time management problem is not using your time to your fullest advantage, to get done what you want done.
- ❖ Myth #5: The busier I am, the better I'm using my time. Look out! You may only be doing what's urgent, and not what's important.
- ❖ Myth #6: I feel very agitated, busy, so I must have a time management problem. Not necessarily. You should verify that you have a time management problem. This requires knowing what you really want to get done and if it is getting done or not.
- ❖ Myth #7: I feel OK, so I must not be stressed. In reality, many adults don't even know when they're really stressed out until their bodies tell them so. They miss the early warning signs from their body, for example, headaches, stiff backs, twitches, etc.

Simple Techniques to Manage Stress

There are lots of things people can do to cut down on stress. Most people probably even know what they could do. It's not the lack of knowing what to do in order to cut down stress; it is doing what you know you have to do. The following techniques are geared to help you do what you know you have to do.

- ❖ Talk to someone. You don't have to fix the problem, just report it.
- ❖ Notice if any of the muscles in your body are tense. Just noticing that will often relax the muscle.
- ❖ Ask other CHWs if you're doing OK. This simple question can make a lot of difference and verify wrong impressions.
- ❖ Delegate.
- ❖ Cut down on caffeine and sweets. Take a walk instead. Tell someone that you're going to do that.
- ❖ Use basic techniques of planning, problem solving and decision making. Concise guidelines are included in this guidebook. Tell someone that you're going to use these techniques.
- ❖ Monitor the number of hours that you work in a week. Tell your clients, family and/or friends how many hours that you are working.
- ❖ Do something you can feel good about.

Let's Get Started

Everything good usually starts with courage. It's picking yourself up, deciding that you could be happier, that you want to be happier - and then doing one small thing to get you started and keep you going. *Stress management starts with courage.* It's the trying that counts.

Let's look at the **Relaxation Response** and **A Month's Worth of Stress Busters**.